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Services

SERVICE TO SURVIVORS

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This directive provides guidance to commanders on the rendering of assistance to the families of persons who are lost in conjunction with U.S. Air Force operations. Directed by the CSAF, this provides a foundation for an Air Force response to Public Law 104-264, Title VII, "Aviation Disaster Family Assistance Act of 1996", October 9, 1996. It is not intended to replace existing policies or directives regarding specific assistance and support programs or the legal authorities governing such assistance. Rather, it explains the overarching vision upon which survivor assistance is based and sets policy for unifying the efforts of those functions which contribute to it.

1. Among the most difficult tasks faced by commanders are those associated with the death of an Air Force member, someone we are supporting, or someone affected by our operations. The Air Force has superior processes in place to assist in the administration of specific services following these unfortunate events. However, experience over time has proven it is essential to offer uniform assistance to *all* affected families who have suffered an Air Force-related loss to the maximum extent possible, and to ensure commanders are fully aware of their responsibilities in obtaining and providing that assistance. This directive establishes policy for ensuring maximum service, both in entitlements and information flow, to families following an Air Force-connected loss.

2. For the purposes of this directive only, an "Air Force member" is considered any active duty or Air Reserve Component (ARC) member, as well as any Air Force civilian employee, who dies in a duty status. Official "line of duty" determinations will be made for entitlement purposes.

3. Commanders must bear in mind that the requirement to provide assistance to survivors is based on the Air Force's broad obligation to both its members and their survivors, which in turn relates to the Service's ongoing commitment to people. Each commander's involvement in post-fatality support is a matter of duty, but must never be seen as a personal burden. When a commander leaves his or her position, ongoing survivor support becomes the responsibility of the new commander.

4. The first priority of all commanders in dealing with next of kin and family members following a member's death is timely, compassionate communication. This begins with casualty notification and must continue as long as assistance is needed and can reasonably be provided. In some cases, legal limits exist

which restrict the amount of time the Air Force may provide specific assistance, e.g., continued use of military housing. However, no specific timeline should be established for how long intangible support, such as assistance in obtaining benefits, should be rendered. People grieve differently and have different personal challenges, such as special-needs children, which demand support and assistance on a case-by-case basis.

5. "Service to survivors" must never be confused with service to the general public, Congress, or the media. Often, the circumstances surrounding Air Force-related losses become a matter of Congressional or press interest. However, releasable information regarding an individual's loss will not be provided to the public or Congress before it has been conveyed to the member's next of kin or a designated family representative, except in cases of overriding public interest. Air Force Instructions and Pamphlets, which support this directive, will include specific information flow procedures to this end.

6. This directive establishes the Air Force Survivor Assistance Program (AFSAP), which includes the following core responsibilities and authorities:

6.1. The Assistant Vice Chief of Staff (AF/CVA) is responsible for promulgating and updating guidance in support of this directive. In addition a single Air Staff manager, (AF/ILV), monitors all support and family communications activities, and remains personally available to respond to questions from survivors if needed.

6.2. The wing commander or equivalent of an Air Force member who dies in a duty status is the focal point for all post-death family support activities. For isolated or geographically separated units, the unit commander assumes this responsibility.

6.3. Functional managers responsible for specific post-fatality entitlements and benefits provide them to next of kin and other survivors in accordance with their respective directives. However, all will coordinate and harmonize their efforts as prescribed by this policy directive and the instructions and pamphlets which implement and support it.

7. Supporting instructions implementing this directive will address the needs of those who suffer personal losses under the following conditions:

7.1. Air Force aviation mishaps.

7.2. Criminal or terrorist acts (under other than combat conditions).

7.3. Natural disasters and mass casualty losses other than the above.

8. See **Attachment 1** for Glossary of References and Supporting Information

9. See **Attachment 2** for measures used to comply with this policy.

F. WHITTEN PETERS
Secretary of the Air Force

Attachment 1**GLOSSARY OF REFERENCES AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION*****References***

DoD Directive 1330.5, *American National Red Cross*

DoD Instruction 1300.18, *Military Personnel Casualty Matters, Policies, and Procedures*

DoD Directive 4515.13R, *Joint Transportation Regulation*

DoD Instruction 6055.7, *Mishap Investigation, Reporting and Recordkeeping*, April 10, 1989

Interfaced Publications

AFPD 24-1, *Personnel Movement*

AFPD 34-3, *Nonappropriated Funds Personnel Management and Administration*

AFPD 34-5, *Mortuary Affairs*

AFPD 35-1, *Public Affairs Management*

AFPD 36-1, *General Civilian Personnel Provisions and Authorities*

AFPD 36-8, *Employee Benefits and Entitlements*

AFPD 36-29, *Military Standards*

AFPD 36-30, *Military Entitlements*

AFPD 36-31, *Personal Affairs*

AFPD 44-1, *Medical Operations*

AFPD 51-5, *Military Legal Affairs*

AFPD 90-4, *Relations with Congress*

AFPD 91-2, *Safety Programs*

NOTE: Related policies are also included in instructions under all of the series publications listed above.

Terms

Active Survivor Assistance Case—One or more family inquiries in the 12th month following the loss (interchangeable with “Long-Term Survivor Assistance Case”).

Civilian Personnel—Personnel who are in on-duty status and are Senior Executive Service, General Schedule, and Wage Grade employees; nonappropriated fund employees (excluding part-time military); Youth Opportunity and Student Assistance Program employees; civilian foreign nationals employed by the US Air Force; and persons otherwise unaffiliated with the Air Force, but affected by Air Force operations.

Contact—Interaction between a family receiving post-loss assistance and the Air Force; may be telephonic, written, or in person, and initiated by either the Air Force or the supported family.

Military Personnel—All Air Force officers and airmen on active duty; Air National Guard and Air Force

Reserve personnel on active duty or in drill status; US Air Force Academy cadets when engaged in directed training activities; members of other US Military Services serving on extended active duty with the Air Force; and foreign national military personnel assigned to the US Air Force. Air Force officers and airmen serving on extended active duty with another Department of Defense component are excluded from this definition.

Mishap—An unplanned event, or series of events, which results in damage to Air Force property; injury to Air Force personnel; injury to on-duty civilian personnel; occupational illness to Air Force military or civilian personnel; or damage to property, injury, or illness to non-Department of Defense personnel caused by Air Force operations.

Privileged Information—Information that is exempt by law from disclosure outside the Department of Defense safety community. It includes findings, conclusions, causes, recommendations, and the deliberative process of the safety board. This category of information also includes statements given to the safety board pursuant to a promise of confidentiality.

Reportable Mishap—An unplanned event or accidental occurrence, or series of events, which results in damage to Air Force property in excess of \$2,000; disabling injury to Air Force personnel on or off duty; disabling injury to on-duty civilian personnel; occupational illness to Air Force military or civilian personnel; or damage to public and private property or injury and illness to non-Department of Defense (DoD) personnel caused by Air Force operations. Damage or injury must fall within the reportable limits specified in DoD Instruction 6055.7. Mishaps are classified by the total dollar cost of damage or the degree of injury or occupational illness. Class A. Total cost of property damage is \$1,000,000 or more; an injury or occupational illness which results in a fatality or permanent total disability. Class B. Total cost of property damage is \$200,000 or more, but less than \$1,000,000; an injury or occupational illness which results in a permanent partial disability; or when five or more personnel are inpatient hospitalized.

Attachment 2**MEASURING COMPLIANCE WITH POLICY**

A2.1. Success or failure in carrying out the objectives of the Air Force Survivor Assistance Program (AFSAP) is judged by those it is intended to serve -- family members who have suffered a loss. This makes ongoing assessment a unique challenge, particularly since there is likely to be only one chance to properly respond to a family's needs under such trying circumstances.

A2.2. The Air Force already has metrics in place for key components of the post-loss support process; for example, see AFPD 34-5 (Mortuary Affairs) and AFPD 51-5 (Claims). In addition, AFPC/DPWC (Casualty Assistance) collects data on its effectiveness in providing entitlements and benefits information to survivors, and AFPD 90-4 (Congressional relations) and AFPD 35-2 (Public Communication) track our responsiveness to Congress and the media, respectively. However, while all of these metrics must be reviewed to ensure the quality of the individual functions they track, measuring the effectiveness of the AFSAP itself requires focusing on the persons who make the program work, and on the specific results of each attempt to execute it.

A2.3. Timely, accurate information for survivors is the heart of the AFSAP, and is central to its credibility. Accordingly, to properly execute the AFSAP, commanders must first internalize the importance of quality information to family members as an integral aspect of our overall Air Force culture, then apply that principle when called upon to do so under the difficult circumstances of a member's death. This means that, for the purposes of program assessment and improvement, metrics are required in three areas:

A2.3.1. The scope and effectiveness of prescribed AFSAP training programs.

A2.3.2. The real-world experience of commanders and other participants in executing the AFSAP's objectives following a member's loss.

A2.3.3. The duration and nature of long-term contacts with family members following a member's loss.

A2.4. Information will be assembled as follows:

A2.4.1. AF/ILV will work closely with the Ira C. Eaker College for Professional Development (CPD), Maxwell AFB AL and provide presentations on the Air Force Survivor Assistance Program to Wing and Group Commander's courses. Compliance will be measured based on student critiques and feedback from the CPD staff.

A2.4.2. AF/ILV will solicit after-actions lessons learned from Survivor Crisis Action Team members and MAJCOM POC's who provide service to survivors following losses of the types described in paragraph 7 of this policy directive. The desired goal is continuous improvement of both the quality of information flow to the affected families and the usefulness of the supporting services. This information will be subject to continuous review by AF/ILV.

A2.4.3. AF/ILV will track all survivor assistance cases which remain active (1 or more inquiries in the 12th month following the loss). The nature of the contact and the process to which it pertains will be recorded in as much detail as possible. This metric is highly subjective and situational, in that it is sensitive to individual grief responses as well as the specific circumstances of a given loss. The

desired goal is to have satisfied all supported families' needs within the first year after their loss so as to help them move forward with their lives. This metric will be subject to continuous review by AF/ILV.